



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

# News Release

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## **AIRPORT SHUTTLE DRIVER ADMITS RUNNING ILLEGAL FUNDS TRANSFER BUSINESS THAT MOVED NEARLY \$2 MILLION TO MIDDLE EAST**

SANTA ANA – An Ethiopian national faces up to five years in prison after pleading guilty earlier this week to federal charges of operating an unlicensed money transfer business in Santa Ana that illegally funneled nearly \$2 million to the Middle East and other countries overseas.

Ali Abdurahman, 37, who appeared in federal court here Monday, admitted he operated a money transmittal business without obtaining the required license from the State of California, and without registering with the Secretary of Treasury, as required by federal law. The charge against Abdurahman is the culmination of a probe by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement that began more than two years ago after ICE received a tip from a San Francisco-based investigator for Bank of America regarding suspicious financial transactions in the Orange County area.

ICE's subsequent investigation revealed that during a 23-month period ending in August 2003, the airport shuttle driver deposited more than \$2.4 million into his personal accounts at several local banks. According to investigators, financial records show he then wired more than \$1.6 million of those funds overseas, primarily to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Investigators say one of Abdurahman's clients was an Ethiopian national named Abubakar Baharun. Baharun, 37, was recently arrested and indicted by a grand jury in Santa Ana in connection with a bank fraud and check-kiting scheme. According to ICE agents, Baharun used Abdurahman's money transmitter service to wire the proceeds from his illegal activities to an account in the UAE.

"This case demonstrates the real threat posed by unlicensed money transmittal businesses. Any criminal or terrorist can come to these underground businesses and have millions wired anywhere in the world with no questions asked," said Kumar Kibble, assistant special agent-in-charge of ICE investigations in Orange County. "ICE's goal is to identify, disrupt and ultimately dismantle these underground financing and transmittal operations."

Abdurahman, who was originally arrested and indicted in 2003, has been out on bond during the ensuing legal proceedings. He is scheduled to be sentenced November 7.

The charges filed against Abdurahman are the latest enforcement action in ICE's nationwide crackdown on unlicensed money transmittal businesses. The USA Patriot Act of 2001 enhanced ICE's ability to combat the international movement of funds through unlicensed money services businesses and so-called "hawalas" by enhancing the 18 USC 1960 statute. All these businesses are now required to be registered with the federal government and licensed by state authorities.

Since the enactment of the USA Patriot Act through April 15, 2005, ICE has initiated more than 280 investigations into unlicensed money services businesses and executed more than 100 search warrants in connection with these cases. During this time period, ICE investigations into unlicensed money services businesses have resulted in roughly 140 arrests, 138 indictments, and the seizure of some \$25.5 million.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*